

BLIZZARD OF '49, WYOMING PUBLIC TELEVISION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Addy: Addy or Adeline Shawgheis.

Interviewer: You had just moved to Douglas, I believe you told me before, from Chicago before the blizzard set in. Is that true?

Addy: We moved from Chicago to make Douglas our home, and we were greeted about a month or two later by this by this daddy-of-them-all storm.

Interviewer: Tell me, where were you living in Douglas when the storm hit? I think the night before was January 1st, New Year's.

Addy: Yes, yes, it was. While we were waiting for our home to be constructed, we lived in a second floor apartment in the business district above the gas company. There were about 3 different families living in the upstairs apartments. We lived there during the storm and for a while afterwards too, but my husband was working as an administrator to the hospital. At that time, Douglas didn't have a real hospital. We were badly in need of one, but the POW, the Prisoners [inaudible 00:01:18] and the German prisoners were serviced in the hospital at the POW camp, what was just a mile or 2 outside of town across the river. He was managing that. He was going to go to work that morning. As he went downstairs, he opened the door to go outside. There was a wall, complete white packed snow, completely up the bottom, covered. There's no way you could [00:02:00] penetrate that, trying to break it down. You couldn't.

So, it was a very, very, very strange storm. There was so much wind attached. The flakes themselves weren't large. They were small, very small. You can't think of a snowflake being dry, but they weren't heavy or wet like most of them are. The snow had drifted to the west side of the street and covered all these buildings, the whole block and beyond the second floor. It must've looked like a snow mountain. Across the street, the walks were visible. Sidewalks were visible. It just came all the way toward our side. We couldn't get out at all, so we had to have somebody come and [inaudible 00:03:13] us out so we could get to ... Well, he couldn't get to work at all, but he was working helping his other. Everybody who was able was out trying to get rid of the snow. Where are we going to put it? It's snow everywhere. So it's stacked up into the

middle of the street because on the other side, it was not drifted at all, but it was a pretty high division between the street there.

Interviewer: Did snow infiltrate your house?

Addy: Yes, indeed. It certainly did. Upstairs, [00:04:00] our living room faced the windows. We had 2 windows in the living room. They faced the west. One window was fine. The other window, somehow during the night, snow had filtered in. Evidently there was a small crack of air or something in the seal of the window. The window was locked shut. It seeped through somehow and came into the living room and stacked up, drifted snow, right at the base of the window and onto the carpet. I remember I got this dish pan we used to do dishes ... We didn't have automatic dishwashers in those days ... dishpan loaded with snow that I dug out and got rid of several of those dishpan fulls. It's the most unusual snow. Douglas has had some mighty big snows. We've been inundated, isolated, no traffic of any kind, but it easily disappeared in short order, a day or two. This one, we were helpless. Where are we going to put it? Because everywhere was the same.

It was such a fine, fine snow, so fine and the wind was so fierce, and the directions it was coming, in all directions. I recall afterwards, it was very interesting, the newspapers had [00:06:00] pictures and unusual scenes that took place because of the snow. This was not in Wyoming, but a ranch here in Nebraska. Went out to go to one of his buildings which was empty, when he opened the door, the whole room was filled with thick snow at least knee-deep and drifting more so. Snow had entered the key hole of the door and filled that whole room. Can you imagine that much snow coming through such a small passage?

Interviewer: The roads must have been horrific to drive through that small passage.

Addy: It certainly was. That was our personal experience of this storm. We'll never, ever forget it, that's for sure. It was so unique, so different from any other storm that we had, but how could such heaps, depths of snow drift with such tiny little flakes?

Interviewer: I'm surprised to learn that there were German and Italian prisoners of war here.

Addy: Oh, yes. When the war broke out in 1941, prisoners, they built camps everywhere, and out here, we had quite a city. Several thousand ...

Interviewer: I know there was a Japanese one up by Cody [crosstalk 00:07:50].

Addy: Yes, indeed.

Interviewer: But I didn't know there was one here by Douglas.

Addy: Yes, there was. They were not Japanese here. They were Italians [00:08:00] and Germans. In fact, our historical society is trying to preserve the uniqueness of their big building that they had. I don't know what they call it, but the biggest building they had. Some of the prisoners, the Italian prisoners had etched scenes on the wall of ... Western scenes, and they are still there on the wall.

Interviewer: Back to the blizzard, you said your dad was the hospital administrator?

Addy: No, that was my husband.

Interviewer: Oh, your husband? I'm sorry. He was the hospital administrator at this POW camp.

Addy: We had moved ...

Male: Try not to play with that cable because I can hear you.

Interviewer: Try not to play with the cable because he can hear it.

Male: Sorry.

Addy: I am too. No, my husband is in the hotel business, but not until we came to Douglas, however. He is from Chicago. I was from Sheridan, Wyoming and here. During the war, he was stationed along the way in Cheyenne and Colorado, so the West got to him. After the war, of course, he had a very good job at Revere Copper and Brass in Chicago, waiting for him. We tried it for a year. It didn't work. Once you live in Wyoming, you're addicted to it. We missed it both so much that we were going to do anything to get back here.

Interviewer: With the storm, did he finally manage to get to work at some point?

Addy: Well, everybody at the hospital was stranded, and he couldn't get out there. We had to wait til the highway [00:10:00] equipment opened the road, and that took a while because there roads to be opened in every direction.

Interviewer: Were the people in Douglas using the hospital or did you have to go to ...

Addy: We didn't really have a hospital. We had a home, a 3-story home we used for a hospital.

Interviewer: Were there any emergencies during the blizzard that people had to get out that you recall?

Addy: Course, little babies aren't waiting, but I, at the time, being a nurse worked for the clinic, which was only a block or two away from our apartment. We had deliveries there in the clinic or whatever needed to be attended to, but nothing very real serious. Thank goodness.

Interviewer: Did you recollect the people in town really pulling together during this blizzard?

Addy: Yes. The response was terrific. Everybody was, men mostly, were out trying to help in some way to get rid of the snow with what equipment they had or shovels or anything.

Interviewer: You don't recall if there were any fatalities in the area, do you?

Addy: No, there was not, not locally within the town. I don't know about ranchers. They may have had some pretty close calls.

Interviewer: See if there's anything else. Did you see a lot of military traffic in town, Army plows and Caterpillars, Army vehicles?

Addy: Later on when they were able to navigate, yes, they came out to help, but as many as could be would assist. [00:12:00]

Interviewer: The animals around Douglas, what ...

Addy: That is sad. I tell you. The livestock, they were helpless, just completely at the mercy of the storm, and they were frozen right into their tracks. You can't get to them to help. It was sad to see them. It was a great loss.

Interviewer: We were talking before about there was some bad snow storms in the '70's and '80's, but ...

Addy: Yes. We often had those, but ...

Interviewer: But nothing like ...

Addy: Nothing like this one. We didn't expect this ordinarily we are well-equipped in our home necessities, food and some water and that sort of

thing. We keep ahead of that knowing we have these severe storms, but this was a magnitude of a really terrific storm. We had no idea.

Interviewer: It was really unexpected.

Addy: It certainly was. We expected snow storm as usual, but no, we got more than what we ordered.

Interviewer: Anything else, my dear?

Addy: No. We'll always remember that storm. It stands out among all the other storms that we had. We managed to live through it. Thank the Lord.
[00:14:00] We're Wyomingites. We can take it.

Interviewer: Got you. Excellent. Thanks so much, Addy.

Addy: Thank you.